

Opposing view: Stop the steroid witch trials

By Norman Fost

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Whether or not Roger Clemens and Lance Armstrong are lying when they deny they used steroids or other performance-enhancing drugs (PEDs) is beside the main point, which is why we are prohibiting, and even criminalizing, the use of these products.

Like the Salem witch trials, the campaign against PEDs is a mixture of hysteria, hypocrisy and misinformation.

The simplistic reply is that sports involve rules, and that penalties are needed to enforce compliance with the rules. But this begs the question of whether the rules have any coherent basis.

One claim for the ban on PEDs is that athletes should compete using their God-given abilities without the assistance of artificial aids. That quaint concept became extinct two milleniums ago when a naked Greek put on shoes to enhance his performance. Every athlete since has used something to help win, whether Gatorade, carbo-loading or caffeine. "5-hour Energy," anyone?



Why should steroids be singled out from the very long list of PEDs? The claim is that they can kill you from heart disease, cancer and strokes. But if you ask the so-called experts to produce a list of elite athletes who died of any of those problems, they have trouble.

The hypocrisy of this witch hunt is epitomized by the moralizing over Armstrong's alleged use of erythropoietin (EPO), a natural human hormone that stimulates production of red blood cells.

According to the moralists and the rule-makers, it's OK to train at altitude to stimulate EPO production, or to sleep in a hypobaric chamber, which simulates altitude. But achieving the identical result using the same hormone by injection, or by infusing one's own banked red blood cells, can cost you all of your medals and a prison term if you lie about it.

The witch hunters are all engaged in enhancing performance, whether it's coffee in the morning, alcohol at night, Viagra on the weekends, or vaccines for their children. Talk about a level playing field! How about consistency and good facts as requirements for joining a witch hunt?

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